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AUTHOR Terry, Gwenith L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The "Portfolio Process in Professional Development" is a competency based teacher education program recently mandated by the Florida State Board of Education as the central element of the Florida Beginning Teacher Program. It involves a probationary year of supervised teaching for the beginning teacher before certification is granted. This model for professional development, which has evolved over 12 years at the University of West Florida, focuses on both pupil learning and beginning teacher performance. The Portfolio Process includes three stages within a given cycle: (1) The beginning teacher collects useful information for his portfolio from multiple sources, possibly from personal writings about his work, students' work with teacher comments, or audiovisual recordings of classroom events. All data included in the portfolio is placed there to represent the teacher's competency. (2) The beginning teacher has conferences with his support team about the data in the folder. (3) A plan of action of how best to achieve the desired competencies is agreed upon by the support team and teacher. The teacher repeats the cycles until the desired level of performance in each competency level is reached as judged by the support team. (JM)

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The Portfolio Process in Professional Development

a

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at the

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by

Gwenith L. Terry

Carl A. Backman

Gordon E. Eade

The University of West Florida

Pensacola, Florida 32514

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INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago reports of competency based teacher education programs began to appear regularly in the educational literature. Massive amounts of time, effort and resources were devoted to the task of specifying teaching competencies, developing instructional modules and reorganizing teacher preparation programs to incorporate competency approaches.

Numerous problems were encountered in the development of competency based teacher preparation programs and clearly no single program emerged as a model for all teacher education. However, from the experiences with competency based education in the sixties and seventies we can conclude that: 1) teacher preparation should promote teaching performance that has been found to be effective in promoting student learning, and 2) teacher competence is best judged within the context of day to day classroom performance.

There is an identifiable body of research which sets forth what we know about teaching and learning; however, the verification of competence in classroom settings has seldom been systematically undertaken.

We believe that the Portfolio Approach which has been piloted by The University of West Florida and mandated in Florida's Beginning Teacher Program provides a model for professional development of teaching competence which focuses on both student learning and teacher performance. We believe too, that this model has the potential to restore teacher education to a dynamic, interactive activity. (Hall and Houston 1981).

The Portfolio Approach herein described:

- Utilizes selected competencies as the organizing principles of the process
- Focuses specifically on elements of competencies without isolation or fragmentation of parts from significant wholes.
- Provides organizational structures which guide the dynamic interactive process of the portfolio building.

- Utilizes the reality base of actual classroom interaction as a primary testing ground for teacher competence.
- Involves the preservice and/or the inservice teacher in professional discussion of the meaning and significance of competency statements with other professionals.
- Places the teacher in a central role of self evaluator, planner and documenter of professional competence.

The Portfolio Approach has evolved at The University of West Florida over twelve years. The concepts have been tested with preservice teachers and inservice teachers. This approach presently serves as a cornerstone of the undergraduate and graduate programs in early childhood, elementary and middle school education. The procedures have been revised and refined as a result of these experiences. The Portfolio Approach was placed in a position of prominence by the legislative mandate for the Beginning Teacher Program and the rules established by the Florida State Board of Education. The materials below describe the approach as currently defined in the early childhood/elementary/middle school undergraduate programs at The University of West Florida. The central ideas are also currently in use in field-based graduate programs.

BACKGROUND OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

More than ten years ago, the Early Childhood Faculty at The University of West Florida began to explore the nature of specific teaching competencies and the processes involved in the acquisition and documentation of competence within a year-long internship for preservice teachers. The field testing of the processes which evolved into the Portfolio Approach was cooperatively undertaken with local school districts. At that early time, the portfolio was known as a "Log". The log was a compilation of student observations and plans for work with children which were organized around five competency statements.

The Portfolio Approach was tested further when it became a major element of an inservice certification program designed to meet educational needs addressed in the 1975 Public Education Act in the State of Florida. The task of designing the inservice certification program was undertaken by a consortium which represented Northwest Florida's educational institutions concerned with

the education of young children. A set of ten competency statements was developed and utilized in this inservice program. Since the Fall of 1977 approximately eighty classroom teachers have utilized the Portfolio Approach as a means of adding early childhood certification to elementary education credentials.

In September 1981 the Portfolio Approach became a major element of the preservice training program for all elementary and early childhood students at The University of West Florida. This training approach was characterized by the use of: (1) a collection of specifically stated competencies, (2) a support team, and (3) the portfolio.

Two specific actions within the State have served to place the Portfolio Approach in a position of prominence. One of these actions was a legislative one. The legislative action, Florida CSSB 338 entitled Teacher Certification/Supervised Teaching (Chapter 81-243) added a provision, effective July 1, 1982, requiring successful completion of one year of supervised teaching. The second action was taken by the Florida State Board of Eduation in establishing rules for the implementation of the legislation which incorporated the Portfolio Approach as a central element of the Florida Beginning Teacher Program. The description of the Portfolio Approach drawn up by the Department of Education paralleled the approach which had been developed at The University of West Florida.

THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

The Portfolio Approach has proven to be a useful tool for facilitating professional development of both pre- and inservice teachers. Strengths of the approach, as implemented at The University of West Florida include the following:

1. provide a personalized approach to professional growth,
2. allows a focus on growth needs in a positive, non-punitive manner,
3. employs processes which can be independently utilized by an individualized teacher,
4. uses a practical strategy which has provided for a continuous recycling as needed or desired,
5. requires the individual teacher to take a principal role in decision-making, and

6. establishes the classroom as the ongoing laboratory for teacher training.

The Portfolio

The portfolio is both a product and a process. As a product, the portfolio is a personalized compilation of information from multiple sources. Each piece of data included in the portfolio is placed there as a means of representing the individual's teaching competency and/or work toward increasing competency. The basic element of the portfolio as we have developed it is a three-ringed notebook. Materials which cannot be organized readily into the notebook format may be housed in expanding files or file folders. Since the portfolio is a very personalized product, no two look alike; the internal organization of the portfolio is adaptable to individual preferences.

The portfolio as a process includes three stages within a given cycle:

1. the collection of data to support teaching competence,
2. the review and analysis of the data by a support team, and
3. the commitment to a plan of action by the teacher.

Data Collection Stage

During this stage of the Portfolio process each participant analyzes his/her own strengths and needs in each competency area. The individual makes decisions concerning where and how his/her work begins based on estimates of personal needs. It is assumed that individuals will have differing beginning points, and growth rates will vary.

The participant collects baseline data for the initiation of the portfolio process. Our experience has led us to look at many sources of data in making judgment as to competency. (See Figure 1.) Perhaps the greatest source of evidence comes from the use of classroom observation instruments. The Beginning Teacher Program coalition has suggested one kind of instrument; there are others a Support Staff or an individual teacher might want to use. Personal writings about a teacher's work in the classroom can reveal the kind of thinking a teacher has engaged in; children's work, when accompanied with a

Figure 1

Sources of Verification of Competence

COMPETENCY	SOURCE									
	Observation Instruments	Other forms of Observ. Data	Interviews	Personal Writings	Plans of Work	Self Observ./ Critiques	Teaching Records	Children's Work	Audio/Video Recordings	Photographs
1. Oral Communication										
2. Written Communication										
3. Listening Comprehension										
4. Reading Comprehension										
5. Fundamental Math Skills										
6/19. Human Growth, Development										
7. Entry Level Diagnosis										
8. Long Range Goals										
9. Lesson Objectives										
10. Instructional Materials										
11. Select/Develop, Sequence Activities										
12. Establishes Rapport										
13. Presents Directions										
14. Test Construction										
15. Establishes Routines										
16. Behavior Standards										
17. Management Techniques										
18. Record Keeping System										
20. Cultural Awareness										
21. Student Self Concept										
22. Positive Interaction										
23. Values Clarification										
24. Special Needs Children										

teacher's explanatory or interpretative comments, can evidence competence unavailable from other sources. Audio and/or video recordings of classroom events or activities could document competency as well. There are many ways of documenting competency. Each teacher and each Support Staff should exercise the option to be as diverse and individual in the collecting of data as necessary.

Review and Analysis of the Data Stage

The second stage of the process of portfolio development is the conferencing of the teacher with his/her Support Team. During the conferencing individuals present evidence of competence to the Support Team. Questions should be raised by Support Team members concerning any aspect of the data presented. Participants look for congruence as well as diversity in the interpretation of the data. The central question to be considered in reviewing and analyzing the data is, "How do these data cluster in relation to the competencies?" The function of the Support Team is to introduce reality into the teacher's thinking concerning his/her own performance. Questioning, probing, and taking other points of view will help the teacher to perceive his/her acts of teaching in a fuller sense.

Commitment to a Plan of Action Stage

Projections for the teacher's future efforts are based on the questions raised and answered in stage two. Compromise between the teacher and the members of the Support Team is necessary in the determination of specific plans of action to be undertaken by the teacher and members of the Support Team. Projections for action for further professional development must be related to the data presented and to desired competencies under consideration. A commitment to action may necessitate study on the part of the teacher, may require assistance of the Support Team and/or may include a broad range of other specific activities. This commitment to action requires, most of all, that the teacher set in motion the kinds of agreed upon activities that are mutually perceived as growth-producing opportunities.

This portfolio process continues to cycle through these three stages until the teacher has met the desired level of performance in each competency area in the judgment of the Support Team.

ROLES OF A SUPPORT STAFF IN THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

Members of the Support Team assisting the teacher in acquiring and in documenting teaching competence act both as individuals and as a team. As individuals they engage in actions including counseling/advising, consulting/conferencing, observing/participating, and documenting/verifying. Our experiences in the development of the Portfolio Approach at The University of West Florida have indicated that support team members must learn how to work individually and collectively in helping a teacher to develop competence. The Florida Beginning Teacher Program recognizes this necessity and mandates that Support Staff members engage in inservice activities which prepare them for the task of serving on a Support Team.

As a group, Support Staff members in the Florida Beginning Teacher Program engage in decision-making related to the review and analysis of data presented to verify competence. These tasks are continuously in progress as the beginning teacher proceeds through the three stages of the portfolio process. In the data collection stage the Support Staff assists in making decisions such as: "What data could be collected which would best illustrate competence?", "Will these data provide sufficient evidence?" and "How else could competence be documented?" In the review and analysis stage decisions such as "Do these data support a particular competence?", and "What pieces of data illustrate competence?" are considered.

The Support Staff also plays a roll in the commitment to a plan of action. These decisions are based on the 'whole' of the teacher's development when viewed in relation to specific competencies. Decisions are based on responses to questions such as, "What tasks must be accomplished?", "Who will undertake agreed upon tasks?", and "When will the tasks be completed?"

In the case of The Florida Beginning Teacher Program the formative judgments of the Support Staff will provide the basis on which the building administrator makes decisions relative to exit from the program and potential certification.

Florida's efforts to assure that every teacher possesses minimal competence suffers from two conflicting realities. One is the concern that minimal competence should mean the same for all people; and two, minimal competence must be situationally determined. Efforts are being expended to define statewide minimal levels of competence, but efforts must also be expended to enhance the Support Staff's skill in making individual and

collective judgments. A more significant question which must be addressed in relation to Florida's bid for quality education is "Will evidence of minimal performances by teachers result in quality education for children?"

SUMMARY

The Portfolio Approach which has been piloted at The University of West Florida, and which has been mandated in the Florida Beginning Teacher Program has the potential to lift the sights of all teaching professionals beyond competency approaches where stress has been on isolated and fragmented competency concerns. We believe this model recognizes and implements the best of formative and the best of summative evaluation in the competent teacher issue. The approach embraces the truths that development and competence are individual matters. The approach provides for extension of competence through manageable support systems. The Portfolio Approach, we believe, is a viable model for professional development of all teachers.